



Senators Feinstein and Voinovich Reintroduce Legislation to Expand Loan Forgiveness Program to Head Start Teachers

*- If passed, bill would offer **up to** \$5,000 of student loan forgiveness in exchange for 5 years of teaching in a qualified Head Start program -*

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Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and George Voinovich (R-Ohio) today reintroduced legislation to expand the federal loan forgiveness program to include Head Start teachers. This bill would provide Head Start teachers with the same opportunity currently offered to eligible elementary and secondary school teachers to receive up to \$5,000 in loan forgiveness in exchange for five years of service in a qualified Head Start program.

Nationally, the average Head Start teacher earns a salary of about \$21,000 – almost half the amount of the average elementary school teacher’s salary of about \$43,000.

“Every child deserves a quality education. And research shows that Head Start is a smart investment in our children’s future,” Senator Feinstein said. **“But many Head Start programs across the country, including in California, are losing qualified teachers to local school districts, in part because the pay is better. And every teacher that the Head Start program loses impacts the quality and access to services for our nation’s neediest children.**

“In order to give every child a jump start in life, we must continue to recruit highly qualified teachers to the Head Start field and prevent the best teachers from leaving. This will help to ensure that our children start elementary school ready to learn.”

“As a long-time champion of early childhood education programs, I am committed to recruiting the best and brightest teachers for the Head Start program,” Senator Voinovich said. **“I am proud to work with Sen. Feinstein to help ensure that all of our children have access to quality educational opportunities from the earliest years. And to do all that we can to help recruit the best educators available for our children.”**

Background:

The Head Start program serves over 900,000 low-income children and their families nationwide, including over 100,000 California children. A survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), found a strong relationship between the education level of Head Start teachers and classroom quality.

But nationwide, only 31 percent of Head Start teachers have completed a baccalaureate or advanced degree program. In California, that number is even smaller – approximately 21 percent of Head Start teachers have completed a bachelor's degree.

Several studies confirm the importance of providing low-income children with the opportunity early on to gain basic cognitive skills. For example, a 2003 Kindergarten Readiness: Head Start Success study of more than 600 graduates in San Bernardino County, California, demonstrated that society receives nearly nine dollars in benefits (i.e. increased earnings and employment) for every one dollar invested in Head Start children.

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